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West look East

Understanding the Soviet Military Threat: How CIA Estimates Went Astray By W. T. Lee (National Strategy Information Center Inc, New York, 1977), \$2.00, 74 pages

In 1976, a heated debate arose amongst senior members of the US intelligence community as to the accuracy of official CIA estimates of Soviet defence spending. As a result President Ford's national security advisers set up a second team of specialists to make an independent assessment of Soviet defence spending, using the same sources as the official CIA team.

The independent team assessed Soviet defence effort at approximately double the official estimate. The official estimate has since been revised, in fact doubled, to bring them in to line with the independent team's high figure, but many US commentators still consider this to be a significant underestimation of the actual Soviet military budget.

In his paper the main portion of which was originally written as a chapter of a larger study (*Arms, Men, and Military Budgets—Issues for Fiscal Year 1978*, Crane Russak, NY, 1977) the author seeks to throw light on the preparation of the two estimates, and explain why the first official estimate was so very low. He has succeeded in producing an admirable summary of the main points of the estimates debate, and in giving a clear account of how the two estimates were arrived at. This alone makes the work worthy of attention.

The author, however, is far less enlightening as to why the estimates differed so widely, and why the CIA were so ready to adjust the official estimate to agree with the independent team. In this latter regard, the work poses more questions than it answers, and casts a shadow on the integrity of the official CIA team. In view of the fact that the whole estimates controversy has become a burning political issue, this result may not be accidental.

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